



8127.0 - Characteristics of Small Business, Australia, 1999

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Women turn away from small business

The influx of women into small business has declined with new operators now more likely to be male according to the results of a survey released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Over the 33 month period between February 1997 and November 1999, the number of male small business operators increased at an average 2.8 per cent per annum, while the number of female operators declined slightly (down a little less than 1 per cent per annum). This represents a turnaround from trends established over the previous two years (February 1995 to February 1997) where the number of women small business operators was increasing at 2.6 per cent per annum compared to 1.5 per cent for males.

Over the same period the number of small businesses operating in Australia increased at an average 3.7 per cent to a total of 999,100 at November 1999.

These businesses were operated by 1.4 million people (941,700 male and 456,200 female operators), which represents an average annual increase in the number of operators of 1.5 per cent since the previous February 1997 survey.

Just over half (58 per cent) of Australian small business operators were qualified with either a basic or skilled vocational qualification (32 per cent) or with a degree or diploma (26 per cent). Of the remaining operators, 38 per cent had completed secondary school without gaining a degree or diploma and 4 per cent had not completed the highest available year of secondary school.

For the first time in this survey, operators were asked whether they used a computer and whether the business had access to the Internet. At November 1999, 59 per cent of small businesses were using computers in their business operation. As the size of the business increased so did the likelihood that the business used a computer; 47 per cent of non-employing businesses used a computer while 85 per cent of businesses employing 5-19 people used a computer.

Only 36 per cent of all small businesses had access to the Internet (61 per cent of those businesses with a computer). Again the larger the business the more likely they were to have the Internet; 27 per cent of non-employing businesses had Internet access compared to 56 per cent of businesses employing 5-19 people.

The most common use of the Internet was for email (30 per cent of all small businesses or 82 per cent of those with the Internet) and research (25 per cent of small businesses or 70 per cent of those with the Internet). As at November 1999, only 8 per cent of small businesses were involved in direct e-commerce (making or receiving payments via the Internet).

Home based businesses make up a very large proportion (62 per cent) of the total small business picture in Australia with 615,500 small businesses which were either operated from home (with no other premises other than the home(s) of the operators), or at home (where most of the work of the business was carried out at the home of the operator(s)). These 615,500 businesses involved 811,200 operators which represented 58 per cent of all small businesses operators.

More details are available in Characteristics of Small Business, Australia (cat. no. 8127.0) available from ABS Bookshop. The summary of the publication is available on this site. If you wish to purchase a copy of this publication, contact the ABS Bookshop in your capital city.

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